

SOURCE MATERIALS ON THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENT

IN MALABAR (1857-1947)

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The conditions in Malabar at the time it fell into the hands of the British are well narrated by C.A. Innes, in his Malabar and Anjengo, Madras District Gazetteer Series kept in the Madras Archives. He has stated that the religious persecutions by the Mysorean Conquerors during 1766-1793 engendered a fierce and abiding hatred between Hindu and Muhammedan communities in South Malabar. The Brahman and Nayar landlords took refuge in Travancore during the invasion and in their place the Muhammadans tilled the land and enjoyed the fruits of their labour. On their return, these landlords began to oust the tenants from their holdings. This was the reason for the Mappilla outrages which wrecked the peace of Malabar during the latter half of the Nineteenth century. The Government of Madras passed the Mappila Acts of 1854, 1856, and 1859 to contain these disturbances (Madras Archives). According to these Acts the possession of war knife was made illegal and the Mappila population of villages implicated in outrages was fined.

In spite of the measures taken by the Government to contain the outrages, disturbances continued. William Logan, ~~xxxxxx~~ Collector of Malabar, who wrote about Malabar, refers to the situation in his Manual of Malabar (Kozhikode Archives) which is a description of the district by the author from his personal experience and contacts. On the 14th October, 1880 the Government received an anonymous petition asking them to redress

the grievances of the Mappillas. As a result of this on the 5th February 1881, William Logan, was appointed Commissioner to inquire into land tenures and tenant rights in Malabar. The suggestions of Logan that the Mappilla outrages were part of a peasant revolt in Malabar ^{have} ~~have~~ been quoted by C A. Innes in Malabar Gazetteer, P 86. Logan's proposals took concrete shape in the Malabar Compensation for Tenants' Improvements Act, (Act I of 1887) (Madras Archives).

Sri A.K. Gopalan, in his History of Indian Peasant Movement (Malavalam) published in 1961 by the Deshabhimani Printing and Publishing House Ltd., Calicut, has opined that the longest peasant struggle during the 19th century which gave brave resistance to the British Army was the Mappills outbreaks in Malabar. He has accordingly opined that the Agrarian Movement in Malabar was Revolutionary based on the active participation of the masses. It was a struggle by the farmers for land and food and is known as the "North Malabar Struggle". Muhammad Abdurahiman also subscribes to the same view that the Mappilla outbreaks were a peasant revolt against the landlords who happened to be Hindus. This has been made clear in his Dissenting Minute, in the Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, 1940 (Vol.I) printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, Madras.

The peasant Movement in North Malabar was part of the national movement for freedom. A number of young men took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement during 1930-32 and courted arrest. After their release from jails they took active part in the movement for the amelioration of the sufferings of peasants in North Malabar. The Congress movement had begun to

spread in this part of the country. The Congress Session at Lucknow in 1936 convened the All-India Kisan Sabha. Sri A.K. Poduval in the History of Peasant Movement in Kerala (Malayalam) states that in July 1936 a Hunger March was organized from Malabar to Madras under the leadership of Sri. A.K. Gopalan. Sri A.K. Poduval was a pioneer of the peasant Movement in Malabar and his book has been printed at the District Co-operative Press, Trichur. He is now the president of the Taliparamba Panchayat. He has preserved many of the material which were proscribed by the Government in 1930 and after. In the Hunger March there were 22 members and it included veteran Kisan leaders like Sri K.P.R. Gopalan, Sardar Chandroth Kunhi Raman Nair, and Sri M.K.Kelu. This famous Hunger March from Malabar covered a distance of more than 1,500 miles in two months but the Government met the marchers with force.

Sri C.Achutha Menon, the present Chief Minister of Kerala, has analysed the peasant Movement in Kerala very comprehensively in his work Kisan Patausthakam (Malayalam) published by Books International, High Road, Trichur. Sri Achutha Menon has stated that the sincere participation of Congress workers in the peasant movement paved the way for the formation of the All Malabar Peasants' Union in 1937. The first President of this organisation was Sri. P. Narayanan Nair and its secretary Sri K.A. Keraliyan. This Union agitated for tenancy Reform and consequently a committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Sri. K.Kuttikrishna Menon, Advocate General, to go into the Tenancy Reform in Malabar. This Committee was appointed by Government Order No. P 1666, Revenue, Madras Government,

dated 5th July 1939, which is kept in the Madras Archives. The Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee is a valuable treatise on the history of Tenancy in Malabar and the impact of peasants' agitation over the reforms from time to time. This Report has been printed by the Superintendent, Government Press Madras in 1940 and is available at the Madras Archives. E.M.S. Nambudiripad in his Dissenting Minute to the Report laid bare the atrocities of landlordism and the consequent plight of the poor peasants and asked the Government to end landlordism without any compensation. This Dissenting Minute has been considered to be an important and valuable historical document.

Even before the formation of the All-Malabar Peasants' Union in 1937 Taluk-wise Unions of farmers known as Kisan Sanghs were functioning in North Malabar. The First Taluk Kisan Sangh Conference was held in Parassinikadavu in 1936. Reports and Resolutions of these conferences were considered as seditious and these have been always kept secret by the peasant leaders and workers. These Reports and Resolutions of the Kisan Conferences in the form of pamphlets are with Sri A.K. Poduval of Taliparamba. They convey the details of the day to day working of the Kisan Sangh. As the activities of the Sangh were viewed by the Government with suspicion and as they were always ready to swoop down on the Sangh, the Sangh carried on its activities secretly and without much publicity. Yet the Sangh reached every farmer in every village. These records now are with Sri. A.K. Poduval as well as with Sri A.K. Keraliyan of Calicut. Preservation of these minute details on the working of the Sanghs is highly essential as there are not many copies extant.

The end of 1939 saw the beginning of the Second World War, the prices went high and dissatisfaction among the people began to mount up. The Government took repressive measures against mass movements of peasants. At this time the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee appealed to the people to observe 15th September 1940 as Protest Day. There were clashes between people and the police. In Morazha a Sub-Inspector was murdered. The Fifth Annual Report of the Kasargod Kisan Sangh (Malayalam) refers to the incidents at Kaygur where the peasants stoned to death a policeman. Four peasants were sentenced and hanged to death on 29-3-43. This was the first time that peasants became martyrs at the altar of Kisan Movement and hence the All-India Kisan Sabha decided to observe this day as All India Kisan Day, which until then was observed on 1st September. Indulal Yagnik, Presiding over the 11th All India Kisan Sabha Conference, on 13-3-1952 declared in his address that Kayyur would even remain in the heart of Indian Peasants and in the pages of the History of Indian Peasant Movement. His Presidential address has been published by Desabhimani Printing Press, Calicut.

Kerala is today the only state where Landlordism has become something of the past. The Tenant has become the owner of the land and there is not a trace of the landlord anywhere. This revolutionary change has taken place because of the mass movement by the peasantry in Malabar. The various Tenancy Acts passed by the Kerala Legislature and their Minutes kept in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Library speak voluminously about the progressive changes that have been brought about in Malabar and other parts of Kerala.